

**ENFIELD TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF A PUBLIC HEARING
MONDAY, APRIL 21, 2014**

A Public Hearing was called to order by Chairman Kaupin in the Council Chambers of the Enfield Town Hall, 820 Enfield Street, Enfield, Connecticut on Monday, April 21, 2014, at 6:55 p.m.

ROLL-CALL – Present were Councilmen Arnone, Bosco, Cekala, Deni, Edgar, Hall, Kaupin Lee, Mangini, Stokes and Szewczak. Also present were Town Manager, Matthew Coppler; Assistant Town Manager, Derrik Kennedy; Town Clerk, Suzanne Olechnicki; Town Attorney, Kevin Deneen

Chairman Kaupin read the notice of Public Hearing, which was published in the Hartford Courant on Friday, April 11, 2014 as follows:

**TOWN OF ENFIELD
LEGAL NOTICE - PUBLIC HEARING
MONDAY, APRIL 21, 2014**

"The Enfield Town Council will hold a Public Hearing in the Enfield Town Hall Council Chambers, 820 Enfield Street, Enfield, Connecticut on Monday, April 21, 2014 at 6:45 p.m. to allow interested citizens an opportunity to express their opinions regarding the proposed acquisition from Connecticut Water Company of a 5.61 acre parcel of land located at 350 Enfield Street.

Chairman Kaupin announced the ground rules for the Public Hearing.

Mr. Kennedy stated Connecticut Water Company approached the Town several years ago to ask if the Town of Enfield was interested in this property. He noted the initial proposal was to transfer the property to the Town for \$1.00 with the caveat that it be used solely for passive recreation. He stated the Connecticut Water Company did the environmental Phase II.

Steve Moriarty, 24 Sidor Drive

Suggested the Town consider using this land for an off-site solar farm for Town facilities. He feels this would be an ideal location for a solar farm. He stated his belief the Town has a lot of parks and he prefers the idea of a solar farm at this site.

Karen LaPlante, 166 North Maple Street – Chairman of the Enfield Conservation Commission

Ms. LaPlante spoke in favor of the acquisition of this land. She cited a number of reasons why the Town should acquire this property:

- Connecting multiple open space parcels by creating greenways is becoming increasingly common with municipalities looking for passive recreational open space.
- Passive recreation is needed which consists of hiking trails, woodland walking trails and landscaped parks for the sheer enjoyment of such areas.
- Passive recreation areas provide habitats for birdwatchers, dog walkers and such areas provide a quiet place for people and children to appreciate nature.
- Enfield needs more special areas where people can enjoy nature.

Ms. LaPlante stated acquisition of this parcel could also assist in flood control, water quality of the downstream Connecticut River and provide habitat protection for various species. She noted any river or stream that travels through a community provides an abundance of life, much of which citizens rarely see. She stated protecting this land forever is an important step in preserving habitats for future generations. She noted once this land is developed, it is gone.

She stated with the exception of utility company properties, there's very little town-owned open space near some very large developments off Manning Road, the west end of Brainard Road and the neighborhoods off Enfield Street, including Dartmouth, Sunset, Woodlawn and Colony Roads.

Ms. LaPlante stated the Conservation Commission supports the acquisition of this property and wishes to actively participate in the planning of the reuse of this parcel once it is acquired.

David Flasinski, 9 Manning Road

Stated wildlife is present on this parcel because no one goes onto that land. He feels hiking paths will disturb wildlife.

Frances Drenzek, 48 Park Avenue

Stated his belief Enfield has enough parks to maintain. He feels it will cost a lot of money to do site work. He feels the Town should be investing money to improve the water pollution control plant rather than a piece of land.

Gretchen Pfeifer-Hall, 4 Somers Road – Member of the Enfield Conservation Commission

Ms. Pfeifer-Hall stated she's in favor of the acquisition of this parcel. She believes parks are important to a community, and that the community should be well-rounded. She noted parks should be located in all parts of Enfield and not just along the Connecticut and Scantic Rivers. She stated parks add value to a community, and people are willing to live near parks. She noted this increases the values of property, which increases assessed value, which means more tax dollars.

She noted this would be a passive recreational area, which would not require a high amount of maintenance.

Ms. Pfeifer-Hall stated the Town recently sponsored a program with Mark Fenton about walkable communities, and there was a very exciting and inspirational discussion. She noted this acquisition falls in line with the Plan of Conservation & Development. She pointed out there are a number of neighborhoods that could enjoy this property.

Jane Liro, 12 Manning Road

Stated she does not feel this is a good piece of property for passive recreation because of the way the land is set up. She noted Manning Road can't take any more traffic.

James Manning, 6133 Bigelow Commons

Stated he does not feel this acquisition would be fiscally responsible. He noted the Town just spent \$600,000 for the new security system. He stated the mill rate went from 27 to 29, and he's not sure people can afford another increase in the mill rate. He agreed with the idea of a solar farm. He noted although the sale price is \$1.00, it may be costly to develop that land. He stated he doesn't believe this will significantly increase the value of surrounding homes.

Cindy Goddino, Connecticut Water Company

Stated when the water company has land it no longer needs for water supply purposes, they first try to work with communities to see that the land goes for open space and recreation before pursuing other avenues.

She stated in the past they worked with eight towns and protected over a thousand acres for open space and recreation, and Connecticut Water Company is eager to work with Enfield to see this land transferred to the Town for open space and recreation.

Gretchen Pfeifer-Hall, 4 Somers Road

Stated a couple years ago, the State of Connecticut was going to create a parking area on Hazard Avenue for the Scantic River Park. She noted there was a public hearing and there was a lot of concern from neighbors about parking in this area and how it might have a negative impact on the neighborhood. She stated that parking lot was built, and there have been no problems. She stated her belief people who use these types of areas are respectful of the neighbors and the environment. She noted she understands some of the concerns expressed, but she feels they're generally unfounded.

David Flasinski, 9 Manning Road

Stated Enfield parks have trash everywhere. He stated his belief use of this area for passive recreation will impact wildlife. He noted there's a high cliff area near the stream running through this land. He questioned whether the Town will need to carry extra insurance for this parcel.

Chairman Kaupin invited staff to respond to questions raised by the public.

Mr. Kennedy stated the only way a solar farm would be possible is if the Town tasked the Connecticut Water Company to do all site remediation, and the Town would then buy the property at its appraised value. He pointed out part of the caveat for this transfer is that it be used for passive recreation.

Mr. Kennedy stated this area has been outlined in the Plan of Conservation & Development for open space acquisition. He noted residents were surveyed when the Plan of Conservation & Development was being developed, and it was learned people wanted this type of acquisition and development.

As concerns the value of economic development, Mr. Kennedy stated open space does have a positive value to the surrounding households.

He noted in terms of building a park, it would simply be the passive recreational use, and there would be no building on this property. He stated the cost to maintain this parcel would be the same cost as maintaining other areas, and there would be no tax increase for this property.

Chairman Kaupin questioned whether there's an estimate for filling in the basins. Mr. Kennedy stated the only figure he has is the number that the Connecticut Water Company put together, which is between \$25,000 and \$60,000.

Mr. Kennedy stated the rear entrance to this parcel would be off of Fairfield Street. He noted the Town of Enfield owns a sliver of land in that area. He noted there would be no entrance from Enfield Street.

Mr. Kennedy stated once the basins are filled in, the majority of the property would become usable open space.

Mr. Coppler stated the Conservation Commission is interested in looking at different grants that would help fund any type of development on this parcel for passive recreation.

Chairman Kaupin invited comments from the public.

James Manning, 6133 Bigelow Commons

Stated Enfield is only one of four Connecticut towns in the black. He noted this is one more thing that the taxpayers will have to pay for and build. He stated the Town will lose \$7,600 in tax revenue if the Town takes ownership of this parcel. He noted if Connecticut Water wanted to sell this land to a private entity, that would be wonderful because the Town would get tax revenue.

Mr. Manning agreed parks are great, but he does not feel Enfield can afford another park. He feels more employees would have to be hired to maintain more parks.

Steve Moriarty, 24 Sidor Drive

Questioned whether the Town can check to see if Connecticut Water would allow the Town to go with a solar farm on this parcel. He noted solar farms can be built on brownfields with very little cost for remediation.

David Flasiński, 9 Manning Road

Stated there's a 20 foot drop to the stream, and he raised the question of liability. He questioned what Connecticut Water Company spent to maintain that parcel on a yearly basis.

Karen LaPlante, 166 North Maple Street

Read from the "Green Plan – Guiding Land Acquisition and Protection in Connecticut". She noted this is a State of Connecticut document.

"Why Protect Open Space – Although each protected parcel has its own unique value, open space as a whole provides a wealth of valuable services to Connecticut citizens. While the full list of benefits is too extensive to include here, these services include options for outdoor play activity and environmental education. Forested areas are especially adept at removing carbon from the atmosphere, which helps to minimize global climate change and flood plains, coastal waterfront and adjacent uplands provide

opportunities to respond to the anticipated effects of climate change. Other valuable open space services are the provision and preservation of scenic beauty, contributions to local sustainable economy from wood, food and fiber production and maintenance of the diversity of Connecticut's landscape. Open space can also provide a variety of specific ecological functions, such as preserving bio-diversity, habitat for rare species, stream flow and water supply protection and flood control. Open space protection will play an expanding role in Connecticut's economic future as businesses increasingly consider quality of life in making decisions on where to locate and expand."

Ms. LaPlante stated the Green Plan and part of the open space acquisition plan calls for 21% of the state's land to be preserved. She noted Enfield needs to be closer to that 21%. She noted according to the 2010 census in Enfield, they had approximately 35,867 people over the age of 18 years of age that might possibly be paying taxes, and the cost to each one of those citizens in the loss of tax dollars is 30 cents a year.

She stated there are state grants available for hiking and walking trails.

She concluded stating possibly the entrance could be located on Enfield Street.

Natalie George, 304 Brainard Road

Stated a goal of the Plan of Conservation & Development is to improve the gateway to Enfield. She noted another goal is the provision of open space and trail development, linking the residential areas to the Connecticut River and making trails accessible to the public. She pointed out this parcel can meet both of those goals. She stated the land itself is ten to twenty feet below the road elevation with a collecting sewer line along one side and the waterworks brook underneath the ponds bisecting the parcel. She doesn't believe Connecticut Water will maintain this parcel indefinitely because sooner or later it will go to commercial use or some other use.

Ms. George noted there are two possible changes. She stated one change could be to remove the liners and shells of the ponds and the banking on the sides of the ponds to return to the original land levels well below the street line. She stated topping the area with soil would provide an open field to be left for natural overgrowth and wildlife which is present in the surrounding lands. She stated a brook running through this parcel and the restriction of a sewer line on one side would not make this an attractive parcel for commercial development.

She stated the second option would be to remove the liners and shells of the pond, fill with soil to the level of the street on the frontage and slope toward the natural level. She stated her impression there's abundant fill available on the state project paid with Enfield's taxes and the Town's school project along Enfield Street.

Ms. George stated a solar structure or any other kind of green development is compatible with open space development, however, the Town would have to consider to what level the Town would need to fill the land to accommodate such things.

She stated her belief an open space parcel would present a pleasant view to people entering Enfield, enhance the surrounding area and provide an opportunity for the Town to develop a major trail system along the brook by acquiring conservation easements on the steep escarpments along the residential properties in that area. She pointed out the heavily developed North Thompsonville area would have access to this trail, which would eventually lead to the Connecticut River, which would provide another goal laid out in the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Ms. George stated this opportunity seems to be a very good chance to partially fulfill two goals of the Plan of Conservation and Development, which was adopted to provide Enfield with a competitive future and to preserve the value of the existing residential community.

James Manning, 6133 Bigelow Commons

Expressed his concern about other expenses the Town has, and he does not feel this project will be fiscally responsible. He noted there are playgrounds and some open space in this area. He pointed out Forest Park isn't far away.

William Demur, 7 Manning Road

Stated this parcel is in his backyard, and he applauds the Town for wanting to purchase this property. He noted this area is presently an eyesore, it attracts mosquitoes in the summer season, and he's embarrassed by the appearance of this property when he takes walks on Route 5. He feels open space is important for everyone. He believes the Town should get rid of the basins, clean up this parcel and make this a natural resource for everyone to enjoy the area. He stated they don't need to add trees because it's a naturalized area with a beautiful brook, which only requires cleaning. He noted there are many deer in the area and a plethora of birds. He acknowledged the parcel is surrounded by a fence, but the fence is dilapidated on the west side of the area, which allows wildlife to enter the parcel. He feels this could be a very relaxing and environmentally educational area for people. He concluded stating his support of acquiring this parcel.

Chairman Kaupin read the following email from Rebecca Olesen, 41 Till Street

"As a resident and local business owner, I encourage the Council to approve the purchase of this property. Enfield has to promote itself and highlight its natural assets and offer residents a place to view and enjoy the wildlife and natural beauty the river affords us. The property is currently an eyesore and could be a nice destination for educational programs as well as for photographers, birdwatchers and the like."

Mr. Kennedy addressed the insurance question and noted the Town's insurance would not go up because this parcel would be covered under the Town's current general liability.

Councilman Deni stated his belief there isn't a need to buy this property. He noted the property doesn't go to the river. He noted the Town has Powder Hollow and Hazard Avenue goes to the river. He noted they're losing tax dollars in North Thompsonville, and if the Water Company wanted to sell this parcel to a developer, he believes that would be great. He agreed this parcel is an eyesore because of the nearby school. He noted most of the residents in that neighborhood are speaking against this, and he understands why.

Councilman Deni stated there's plenty of open space in Enfield. He noted CL&P has plenty of property down Manning Road, and the Town would be happy to have that property. He stated the Town would also like to have the Water Company's property between Booth Road and Sharren Lane if it became available.

As concerns the open space behind the Enfield Senior Center, Councilman Deni stated he doesn't see anyone using that open space.

He voiced concern about Public Works added responsibility of keeping this parcel maintained. He stated his belief the Town isn't in the real estate business, and he's totally against this acquisition.

Councilman Cekala stated she would like a quote on how much it will cost to fill the basins.

Councilman Arnone stated this is an opportunity to make an eyesore more attractive. He noted he would like to see this parcel go back to its natural state so people can enjoy it for what it is. He stated his belief this property wouldn't sell for anything commercial because of the wetlands.

Councilman Mangini stated her understanding if the Town makes something out of this parcel that is other than open space, there would be a cost to the Town. Mr. Coppler stated if the Town acquires this property, the plan would be to fill in the basins. He noted beyond that they could work with the Conservation Commission to do some type of design for this parcel, and they could then seek out grants to develop a nature area with walkways.

Councilman Edgar stated primarily this parcel would be coming off the tax rolls, and it will decrease the grand list. He stated the Water Company estimated \$20,000 to \$60,000 to fill in the basins. He noted the Town would have that expense if they acquire this parcel. He stated there's the issue of insurance, and he's not sure whether the Town can get a rider on a policy. He noted if this is a town-owned parcel and it's opened to the public, the Town is liable for anything that might happen there. He pointed out he's not against open space, however, he doesn't believe this is the right place to have it.

Councilman Bosco stated this would be a tax decrease. He noted the Town purchased Moody Road, Chapel Street, and now they're talking about purchasing this parcel. He pointed out that amounts to three parcels being taken off the tax rolls in the past year. He stated if there was a good use for this parcel, he would not

have a problem with this. He feels there is no use for this property. He noted for the most part, the only thing on this parcel is escarpment and mud, and it's not easily walkable land. He stated before acquiring this property, he would like the Council to walk this parcel to see what's there.

He stated Public Works employees are taxed with the work they currently have, and only so much can be done with seven employees. He noted as the Town acquires more property, they will have to employ more Public Works employees, which equates to more dollars. He pointed out they have a trash problem at the Scantic River Park, and he believes the same thing will happen at this parcel. He noted this property is not easily accessible. He stated his preference Connecticut Water sells this property and the Town gets tax dollars.

Councilman Szewczak stated her belief it's the role of government to maintain open space. She noted not every park is handicap accessible. She stated her belief property values will improve with nearby open space. She noted she's in favor of this acquisition.

Councilman Hall pointed out the Council charges the Conservation Commission and the people who worked on the Plan of Conservation Commission to look at such plans. She feels these plans are a blueprint for the future. She noted she's definitely in favor of open space. She stated it took many years to develop the Scantic River Park, and she's in favor of looking at other sections of town that are lacking open space. She feels this is a good proposal, and there's money in the Conservation Fund that can be utilized to fill these basins.

Chairman Kaupin stated he would like more discussion with people in that neighborhood to understand if there are truly concerns about moving that property to open space. He noted he understands the fiscal concerns, but if it's a priority to people, in the end the dollars spent to purchase and convert is just as important as buying a new trash truck, hiring a police officer, funding education, or school security. He stated this is not new spending because it gets blended into what the Town's overall spending is, and if it's a priority, then they find the dollars to do it.

He stated he's a believer in open space, and he doesn't want to see development on that land and he hopes the residents feel the same way. He noted the alternative is open space, which preserves a neighborhood. He stated he wants to speak more with neighbors, and he wants a firmer cost to fill in the basins.

Chairman Kaupin stated if they move forward with this, they should not only work with the Conservation Commission but also the neighbors in the area to help design what they want to see on this parcel and figure out the best access to this open space.

As no others wished to speak, Chairman Kaupin closed the Public Hearing at 8:04 p.m.